

Sunday School Lesson

Luke 21: The Olivet Discourse (January 22, 2023)

Introduction:

We are discussing Jesus' activities in Jerusalem during the days after He entered the city on what is now known as Palm Sunday. We have already talked about how He spent a lot of time in the Temple.

Widow's Mite

In one such visit, Jesus was sitting opposite the church treasury, watching the people. Over the years people had made many rich donations to the Temple so that it was decorated in gold, silver, and jewels.

Herod had donated a golden vine with clusters of golden grapes nearly six feet tall. The gifts were displayed on the walls and suspended in the portico. They constituted an unimaginable collection of wealth. There were thirteen chests with funnel-shaped openings stood in the court of the women. Each was labeled for a specific use, and donations were given accordingly.¹ Read **Luke 21:1-4**.

The widow's "mite" was the smallest coin in use at that time. It was called in Greek a "lepton," and was worth less than a penny. Jesus was pointing out that difference in the full commitment of the woman versus that of the man.

The Olivet Discourse

This is Jesus' most descriptive account of what the future holds. Jesus talks of two destructions – that of the Temple, but also that of the world.

- Destruction of the Temple: Jesus starts by warning the people not to put their faith in earthly/material things – these will not last forever. Despite how beautiful and seemingly solid this Temple is, one day it will be destroyed with not one stone left on top of another.

⁵ And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶ "As for these things which you see, the days will come

¹ Spencer's notes

when there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” (Luke 21:5-6)

○ When will this be?

⁷ And they asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign when this is about to take place?” (Luke 21:7)

○ Jesus’ comfort (**Luke 21:8-9**)

● Foreboding – when will this be?

¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹ there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. ¹³ This will be a time for you to bear testimony. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; ¹⁷ you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives. (Luke 21:10-19)

Verse 18 says, “**not a hair of your head shall be lost**”. This verse is widely interpreted as the Lord saying, that some would die as martyrs for Me but their spiritual preservation would be complete. They will die, but not perish.²

You will have opportunities to testify about your faith – it may be in words, or it may be in actions. But, don’t worry ahead of time about what to say or do; Jesus will provide wisdom for the occasion.

² Spencer’s notes.

- Destruction of Jerusalem: As foretold by the ancient prophets (Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah) Jerusalem will be surrounded and destroyed, the people therein killed. Read **Luke 21:20-24**.

*Thy holy people possessed thy sanctuary a little while;
our adversaries have trodden it down. (Isaiah 63:18)*

- This was literally fulfilled in 70 AD when the city was destroyed by the Romans. John Spencer summarized the events as follows:

The Jewish people had endured religious insults and monetary pilfering under corrupt Roman governors for some time, and when they reacted negatively to it Rome countered brutally. Governor Gessius Florus killed over 3,000 people and Jewish zealots wrested control of Jerusalem away from the Romans in an effort to inspire its inhabitants to join in their revolt. Nero dispatched General Vespasian to deal with the uprising which had spread into Galilee in the north. But in June, 68 Nero committed suicide to avoid being assassinated by subordinates.

In the ensuing year, Servius Sulpicius and Maarcus Salvius Otho successively took the throne and were promptly terminated. Vitellius (Aulus Vitellius Germanicus) took the throne but lost the support of the Roman army. The eastern Roman legions backed Vespasian as the new emperor, who abruptly departed for Egypt in late 69 and orchestrated the demise of Vitellius from there. Vespasian left his son Titus, about 30 at the time, in charge of subduing Jerusalem, which was finally accomplished in September, 70, after a seven-month siege that left the temple burned, much of the city

destroyed, and a majority of the populace of Jerusalem dead because of starvation.

Centuries earlier Moses had prophesied of this devastation and destruction (Deuteronomy 29:22-23), and the reasons for God's fierce judgment (Deuteronomy 29:24-25) on the land and dispersal of the people from the land. (Deuteronomy 29:22-23). Moreover, Moses prophesied that a stranger from a far land would be a confirming witness to the aftermath of the destruction.

Men are accountable to obey, not sit in judgment on the word of the Lord. Revelation brings responsibility. This principle can be found many times in the N.T. also. "To him who knows to do good (revelation) and does not do it (responsibility), to him it is sin". (James 4:17).

- Even today Jerusalem is "trodden down (ruled) by the Gentiles." Jesus said this will come to an end and Jerusalem will be restored to the Jews.

John Spencer elaborated that the N.T. distinguishes between the riches of the Gentiles, the fullness of the Gentiles, and the times of the Gentiles.

1. The *riches* of the Gentiles (Romans 11:12) refers to the place of privilege which the Gentiles enjoy at the present time while Israel is temporarily set aside by God.
2. The *fullness* of the Gentiles (Romans 11:25) is the time of the Rapture, when the bride of Christ (the church), will be completed and taken from the earth and when God will resume His dealings with Israel.

3. The *times* of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) really began with the Babylonian captivity 521 B.C., and will extend to the time when Gentile nations will no longer assert control over the city of Jerusalem

Down through the centuries from the time of the Savior's words, Jerusalem has been largely controlled by Gentile powers. Emperor Julian the Apostate (A.D. 331-363) sought to discredit Christianity by disproving this prophecy of the Lord. He therefore encouraged the Jews to rebuild the Temple. But while they were working, they were interrupted by an earthquake and balls of fire coming from the ground. They had to abandon the project.³

- The Second Advent of Christ: There will be great signs that Christ is coming again – and it cannot be missed by anyone (despite what Jehovah's Witnesses claim). This will be a part of the end of this world, as we know it. Read **Luke 21:25-28**.

The end of this world will be part of a cataclysm so great that even the sun, moon, and stars will be moved! People will panic!

*⁸In the whole land, says the LORD,
two thirds shall be cut off and perish,
and one third shall be left alive.*

*⁹And I will put this third into the fire,
and refine them as one refines silver,
and test them as gold is tested.*

*They will call on my name,
and I will answer them.*

*I will say, 'They are my people';
and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"* (Zechariah 13:8-9)

(When you have time, read Zechariah 14 for a description of the coming battle)

³ Spencer's notes.

- And when will this happen? Signs of Jesus' second coming will be obvious to anyone paying attention. Read **Luke 21:29-33**.

²⁹ And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all has taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Jesus said **this generation would not pass away until all things take place**. There are a couple of interpretations of this. 1) Some believe that "this generation" refers to people living when these signs begin to take place. All these events would take place in one generation. 2) Others believe that "this generation" refers to the Jewish people. The Greek word "*genea*" can be read as race. The Lord was saying the Jewish race would survive, scattered yet indestructible. A remnant of Israel will turn to Christ.⁴

- This will all happen quickly, so be ever on your guard and pray that you can withstand the chaos. Read **Luke 21:34-36**.
- Matthew related a parable to make this same point. Read **Matthew 25:1-13**.

Summary:

Time is short for Jesus and He knows it. Much trouble is coming to Jerusalem, the Temple, and especially His followers. All of this has happened and we are still seeing persecution of Christ's followers.

So, when is the end of the world coming?
How will we know?

⁴⁴ Spencer's notes.

What are we supposed to do until then?

Jesus tells us that He will come again to end all of these troubles. But He will come suddenly, so be ever vigilant and pray for substance until then.

References:

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3. Harper Study Bible, Revised Standard Version, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985.
4. Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume, Regency Reference Library, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1961, pp. 1484-1487.
5. Larson, Bruce, Mastering The New Testament: Luke, Lloyd Ogilvie, General Editor, Word Publishing, Dallas, TX, 1983, pp. 207-240.
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9. Spencer, John, notes he prepared for teaching Luke 21 on January 22, 2023.